BRAVING DEATH TO RESCUE THE WOUNDED UNDER FIRE

The Call Comes, the Ambulances Dash Out Into the Night on Their Perilous Trip to First Line Trenches

Intrepid Young American Drivers Scoff at German Shells as They Hurry to Salvage War's Human Wreckage

Some of the finest acts of heroism in the great war are being performed by the young Americans, college men for the most part, who are driving ambulances in France. William T. Martin, who has been writing so interestingly of trench life in France, was one of them. He lived their life, shared their dangers, and here he tells their story.

By WILLIAM T. MARTIN.

THE voices of the men as they sit around the long, cleanly spread table in the well appointed room become indistinct against the din outside which shakes the house. As they talk louder the noise grows in volume and becomes a confusion of deep roars, distant crashes, sharper explosions nearer at hand and things that go shrieking by overhead in the night.

It is one of the intermittent French bombardments of the German trenches of the past few weeks. The men, listening for a moment for the sharp, tearing crashes denoting a reply from the other side and hearing nothing, know that so long as this continues there will be few wounded on their own side, and the dinner goes on.

With the exception of two or three men now threading their way through the blackness to the trenches in answer to a call received some time ago, the gathering represents the ambulance corps for the sector, which includes seven miles of some of the most hotly contested trench front in France. The majority of the corps are Americans. They are all young men; some with professions, others from college or business back home.

Before the war a German family lived here, a family of distinction, apparently, and wealth. It seems as though the Germans have spared the place, for it now stands almost alone with heaps of ruins on all sides within half a mile of the German trenches. On the third floor the blinds remain untouched and movement is restricted. The Germans, from the top of the hill, can look over and see what is happening.

Several shells have fallen in the garden in front and as a consequence the room next to the dining room is in ruins. The men find consolation in believing the shells were intended for the soldiers and equipment going along the road to the trenches that passes by the house.

Although the dining room faces away from the trenches the shutters are closed, heavy curtains are drawn and every precaution is taken to lessen the danger of a ray of light passing outside.

While the men talk the tinkle of the bell above the door connected with the telephone in the barricaded office downstairs suddenly sounds and a French orderly answers the telephone and runs upstairs with a call for two cars. Five seriously wounded, he says, at a certain trench post near the end of the sector.

The two men next out have on their coats already and are on their way to their cars in the yard. It is a bad call in the dead of night, for the road leads a mile or so under the very noses of the guns now hurling destruction at the Germans and the men know the Germans might return the fire any minute.

Outside, the two fumble around to crank their cars and then are off. From a world of soft lights, reminiscences and friends, they find themselves in utter darkness and are unable to see their hands on the wheels. Through the din, other noises, the rattling of chains, wheels creaking, seem to come up from all sides of the cars. Voices, an occasional shrill "Attention!" and maledictions go through the air like the whistling of the shells as wagons here and there come together. There is little restriction on noise now, for the Germans are unable to hear.

The driver in the lead finds the right of the road by brushing the wheels of his car against a curb, for there was once a town here, and leaning forward with bulging eyes and ears strained, runs along slowly with muscles drawn ready to stop instantly at the first sound that might denote something in front. Occasionally, almost periodically, he blows long low blasts on the horn, as a ship in a fog. It is his consuming ambition to get to the wounded as quickly as possible and avoid a smashup.

Around a bend in the road and past the shadow of a fringe of buildings, a rocket flaring over the trenches reveals enough of the road for him to get his bearings and proceed with confidence for a short distance. Here there is an octrol, a toll station before the war, and the road forks. Sentinels stand to demand the password and see that the endless stream of wagons now on the march up shall take the less exposed road to the left.

Both join again a mile ahead. At this point countless German shells spread death at all hours almost. The Germans here are sure of the range and know the equipment must pass this point on its way to the trenches. The road is even now pitted with shell holes that cannot be filled up until tomorrow. As the driver passes this point his breath comes quicker and he half expects to hear the familiar, merciless shriek of a shell crashing into the road.

He takes the road to the right. The motor of the ambulance makes little noise and will not be heard to-night. Before he enters upon the road he zigzags through narrow openings among tall screens of burlap material put there by the French to cut off the view of the Germans from their positions on the hill a quarter of a mile away. The road here is in excellent condition. It is because of the absence of all transports and by the light of the periodic rockets that the driver is able to make better time.

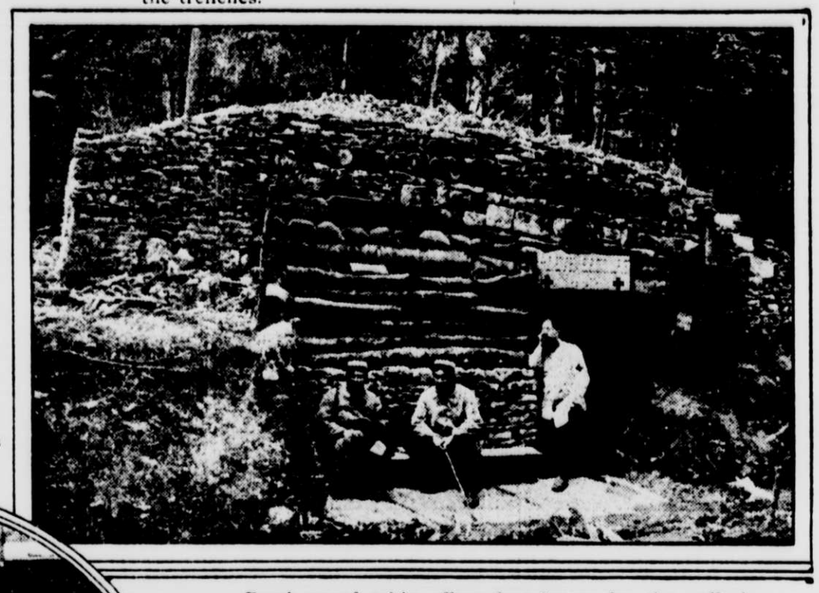
Passing through the last town up, expecting a collision any instant as he enters the jumble of seemingly innumerable wagons, horses and men drawn up in all positions preparatory to unloading, he comes upon the last stretch of open road to the trenches.

A long, winding upgrade is marked by dozens of flashes that shoot out along the sides as French guns hurl their missiles into the German trenches, sending up deafening, head-splitting crashes. The way is packed with soldiers on the march up as though an attack is imminent, and heavy artillery wagons drawn by six or eight panting horses and maddened pilots in front dash by both ways with fresh supplies of shells for the guns.

Keeping to the road and avoiding collision is now largely a matter of instinct and luck. The flashes of the guns play strange tricks with the vision of the driver and the roar of the explosions makes him light headed.

American ambulance drivers unloading wounded back of the trenches.

Cellar connected with trenches, only safe place for the wounded.



Bomb proof cabin offers first haven for the suffering.

Trench ambulance workers must brave poison gas as well as bullets.

It seems as though all the guns in the sector were being let off at the same time, with the deep, crashing resonance of the big guns, the .220 mortars, the low swish of their shells, taking several seconds to land, their thundering crash; the innumerable reports of the smaller guns, the sharper shrieks and the penetrating crashes of their shells tearing apart the German trenches and the splitting reports of the .75 guns exploding just along the edge of the road.

The canvas body of the car shakes and the driver's hands clutch the wheel tighter. Were the Germans to fire at the batteries now the loss of life would be terrific.

The road now passes along the third line trenches and is shadowed frequently by woods still standing. The glare of the rockets over the trees and the flashes of the pounding guns give a weird effect to the silent hundreds marching up on the right and the long lines of straining horses drawing the heavy transports to guns further on. In that long silent mass the driver has many friends. As he passes he hears the words, "Americain" and "Vive l'Amerique." It shows the enthusiasm of the French for the American.

As he continues, every faculty exerted, prepared by practice not to be surprised at whatever might happen, some one shouts "Attention!" in a sharp voice. He looks ahead but can see nothing. Then above the uproar he hears the rapid clink, clink of heavy chains and an accelerated rumble of something great and irresistible bearing down on him with uncontrollable momentum.

He cannot turn to the right, for there are many wagons; so with all his might he swerves to the left, half expecting the car to go over an embankment he knows to be somewhere at this part of the road. Instantly the thing, drawn by wild, ungovernable horses, dashes by with a sickening rattle and bumping, missing the ambulance so narrowly that the driver has felt the danger as though of a hot gust of air.

Little by little the wagons disperse through the woods to the various batteries. They take roads changed day by day to counteract the range calculations of the Germans. The driver finds himself practically alone except for the plodding masses of troops. It is very near the trenches now for above ground work. The flashes of rifles and grenades exploding in the first line can be seen on a little rise of the hill to the right.

The Germans are beginning to open fire on the road, for he hears the crashes in front and smells the suffocating smoke of shells exploded a short time ago over the spot he is now passing. He knows many of the larger shell holes in the road, but frequently the car bumps dangerously into others, and it seems at times that something must give. It is hardly a road now, but a continuation of shell holes. No vehicles are allowed to pass but the ambulances.

The driver seems sharply to right of the road and finally pulls up at something that looks like a low mound. He blows the horn softly and almost instantly two brancardiers come up from somewhere. It is the trench post. Just back of the third line from where the call was sent some time ago. In the daytime the ambulances remain some distance back under the cover of the woods and the wounded are carried down in trenches.

Several months ago this post was in an old stone house where the mound now stands. It has since been razed by the almost incessant shell fire, and the post is now deep under the ground where the cellar of the house was. Previously many of the doctors and attendants were killed by the fire.

As the driver dismounts there is a heavy crash as a shell explodes some distance away, apparently on the road he has just come over. The French guns seem to have become silent, and now the Germans are directing an occasional fire at the batteries along the road. The driver hopes it will stop by the time he goes back.

There is a wounded Lieutenant, the brancardiers hastily explain, too badly hurt to be brought down by the regular stretcher carriers. Would monsieur go over into the woods where he lies? Half a dozen soldiers spring out from the darkness and follow the car as it continues over a section of road seldom taken by the soldiers, who prefer the trenches running up to the first line along the sides. The car passes around a dead horse that probably strayed from a mewhere in back and was caught by a shell. Now the trenches are everywhere.

The driver stops the motor and the soldiers push the car along. This is to avoid attracting the attention of the Germans, only screened from sight by the blackness. Frequently a rifle ball pings past the car as some German shooting at the French trenches holds his rifle too high. During an attack here it would be impossible to escape being hit.

Finally, when within a few hundred feet of the first line, they pull up at another mound along the road and the car is quietly turned around while two men carry something over. It is a man on a stretcher; but it is too dark to see his face. There is just an occasional low groan as the stretcher is unavoidably jolted on its way into the car. A hand is raised and a voice pleads, "Have mercy and go slowly."

"It is very bad, be quick," the brancardiers tell the driver as he steers his car back to the place where he can start the engine.

As he comes to the next post he stops and two more stretcher cases are placed inside. Just how badly these men are hurt he does not know, for nothing is said except a word or so as the men are bidden good-by and good luck.

The ambulance now starts on its long, hazardous trip to the hospital seven miles back, where there is surgical aid. The driver goes over the shell holes with all the care at his command and winces at the groans of the injured men inside.

Fortunately the Germans have for the moment ceased to fire at the batteries along the road. All is quiet now except for an intermittent grenade and rifle fire in the trenches and the frequent sharp poop, poop, poop of a machine gun.

At the little town on the road down a brancardier, watching from one of the dressing stations, rushes out to the ambulance as it goes through and asks whether there is room for one sitter. The driver pulls up long enough for a man with a face swathed in bandages to climb into the seat beside him.

On the way back the soldier manages to mumble a few words now and then telling how he was hurt. Part of his jaw is gone. His eyes are completely covered by the bandages and only part of his nose sticks from the muslin. But he manages to hold his place on the seat with little concern. The tension of months is over and he speaks as though he has been fortunate. He thinks it might have been worse.

In the darkness dark splotches grow larger in the white of the bandages as the blood soaks through and runs down over his uniform. His eyes are gone, he thinks, and something is wrong with his mouth. It is his chin, probably, that is missing, he says. He was caught in the face by part of an exploding grenade.

"But," he says, "I can walk, I still have arms, I can hear and it is great to know that."

He was too happy before without knowing it, he continues. He has seen lots during those months up there and he has no complaint. He thinks probably of the groaning load inside and of the possibility that maybe chance after all has favored him. He can still do lots, he says, to make his life useful. Hundreds of others are in the same situation. It is thus with the French soldiers.

Most of the wagons the car now passes are going in the same direction. As the driver turns to the left of the road to go by he takes broad chances in the darkness with possible teams coming from the other direction. As he continues back trees and buildings spring up on both sides of the road and driving becomes more difficult. The driver has developed a new sense. At present something seems to guide him that does not exist on the return when the car is empty. Then again, he almost stops, working his way slowly to the right, and reaches out to feel the trees he knows to be along the side.

Suddenly he halts. He hears and sees nothing, but he feels there is something in front. He gets off and walks some distance ahead and runs into a load of raillike bars projecting from the back of a wagon. The sharp ends are on a level slightly above that of the radiator of the ambulance. Had he gone a few feet further the points would have caught both men on the seat. The wagon suddenly proceeds and the driver goes back and again starts off. He has had this experience several times.

Half an hour later he enters the town where lights are permitted and several minutes later, guided by the car's headlights, he pulls up at the surgical ambulance. Here the trains arrive daily to take the wounded collected in the last twenty-four hours to towns in the rear, safe from shell fire.

The ambulance represents a group of tents, some woolen structures and several giant motor trucks, their rear ends connected to certain of the tents. The whole thing is arranged to be packed into the trucks and got under way in a few hours.

As the ambulance stops the motor at the front end of one of the trucks starts up. Immediately everything is flooded with light. Inside, doctors put on clean white uniforms and several orderlies come toward the car. The driver gives instructions regarding the condition of the wounded as they are unloaded.

Some time later, after being passed through several tents, the wounded lie on tables in the operating room awaiting the surgeons. Two of the men present horrible sights. Delirious with pain they gnash their teeth and cry for death. It is hard to regard them as men. They are almost incredibly torn; but still they live. The human body can stand a lot.

To Tartol, the crack surgeon of the ambulance, it is always the same story. In times of attacks when seconds count, I have seen him cut into a man's skull and with hammer and chisel ream out a hole large enough to place several fingers on the brain, sew the scalp over the hole, and then stuff a wad of gauze into a small aperture left open. Some weeks later I have read a card from the same soldier written at a hospital in the south thanking him for his life. In a rush, Tartol will perform such an operation in twenty minutes. Otherwise, there is little hope. An amputation he does in a few minutes.

On the return, the driver takes a badly wounded man from the ambulance to a hospital in a village he passes through. Both legs and an arm have just been amputated. They say his case is too serious for him to be carried on the train the next day. So he will rest a while.

At the hospital he stares placidly at the ceiling and seems to be trying to think what he occasionally jerks his stumps of limbs. He is sluggish out of his mind. He is very young. He is put into a ward with others of his kind—crippled beyond description, for this is a last hope hospital. Only the worst of the wounded are taken here in the thought that possibly they may recover enough to be sent back.

It is a little stuffy ward with no ventilation and the only light is from a flickering candle on a table in the middle of the room. Around it the mangled wrecks lie stretched in all positions. They writhe in their agony, these beings of lost hope, and the expressions of their eyes are not forgettable.

In this place there is another room. They call it the chamber of death. Only cases entirely given up are taken there. Side by side they lie on the floor, long rows of them, some still in their uniforms, horribly torn.

They lie here awaiting death. When that comes they are turned over into the rough pine boxes waiting at their sides and taken away. As they lie there, some with head wounds say strange things. It is a strange sight in the night time. Sometimes they sit up, tie and untie their rough boots, do little things about their uniforms, and with the stare that knows and sees nothing, sink back again, nearer their time.

From day to day they whisper of many things, these beings, of home, friends, little joys, hates and former hopes.

Again at the ambulance quarters, Smith, the driver, enters the room where the men were at dinner some time ago. The table has been cleared and is now strewn with books, magazines and papers from home. Some of the men are sitting around writing and a music box somewhere is playing away.

A cheery fire burns in the big fireplace. Smith goes up to it, for he is chilled with the ride.

"Anything happen?" some one asks casually.

Smith answers in the negative, for the trip has not been unusual.

UNCLE SAM ENTERS SOCIAL WELFARE WORK

Neutrality Squad of the New York Custom House Now Has Thoroughly Appointed Clubhouse

WITH the approval of Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo, announcement has been made of the organization in New York by Thomas E. Rush, Surveyor of the Port of the first Social Welfare League in the Federal departments. One of the chief objects of the league is to provide comfortable clubrooms where the 350 night inspectors and customs guards who have been exercising unusual vigilance in preventing violations of the neutrality laws may occupy their leisure time in reading, playing pool, checkers, chess and dominoes, and indulging in friendly contests for which prizes will be offered.

Not only will the Social Welfare League benefit the 350 neutrality guards, but the total membership may take in all the 1,636 employees making up the personnel of the Surveyor's office—an increase of 880 in the past seven years. There are twelve separate divisions of activity in the office and they include inspectors (425), weighers (117), gaugers (13), neutrality guards (350), stampers (36), clerks (90), deputies (5) and laborers (600). Several of the divisions have maintained separate associations for mutual benefit in the past, but this plan raised a class distinction between the men in the different branches which was a bar to beneficial cooperation. An important feature of Surveyor Rush's plan for his men is the participation of all the employees of the office in the same sick and death benefit fund. The importance of this feature is shown by the fact that on retirement they do not receive Government pensions.

The jurisdiction of the Surveyor covers 650 miles of shore front, and many of the men, especially the members of the neutrality squad, who are posted in every conceivable point in the Port of New York where an effort to violate the neutrality laws might be made, are exposed to the hardships of winter weather with sometimes disastrous results to themselves. The fact that these men will have comfortable clubrooms in which they may occupy their leisure in a profitable manner while awaiting a call to duty is expected to increase their ability to withstand the rigors of the weather to which they are subjected while on post.

Surveyor Rush's announcement of the establishment of the club contains the statement that "there have been many cases of sickness and death in the past year and no way to provide for those who are bereft except by assessment upon the remaining members of the particular staff to which the deceased may have belonged. Sometimes an assessment comes inappropriately upon a man who has sickness in his own family, while a large number of the men are in the superannuated class, at least six of them being between 85 and 91 years old."

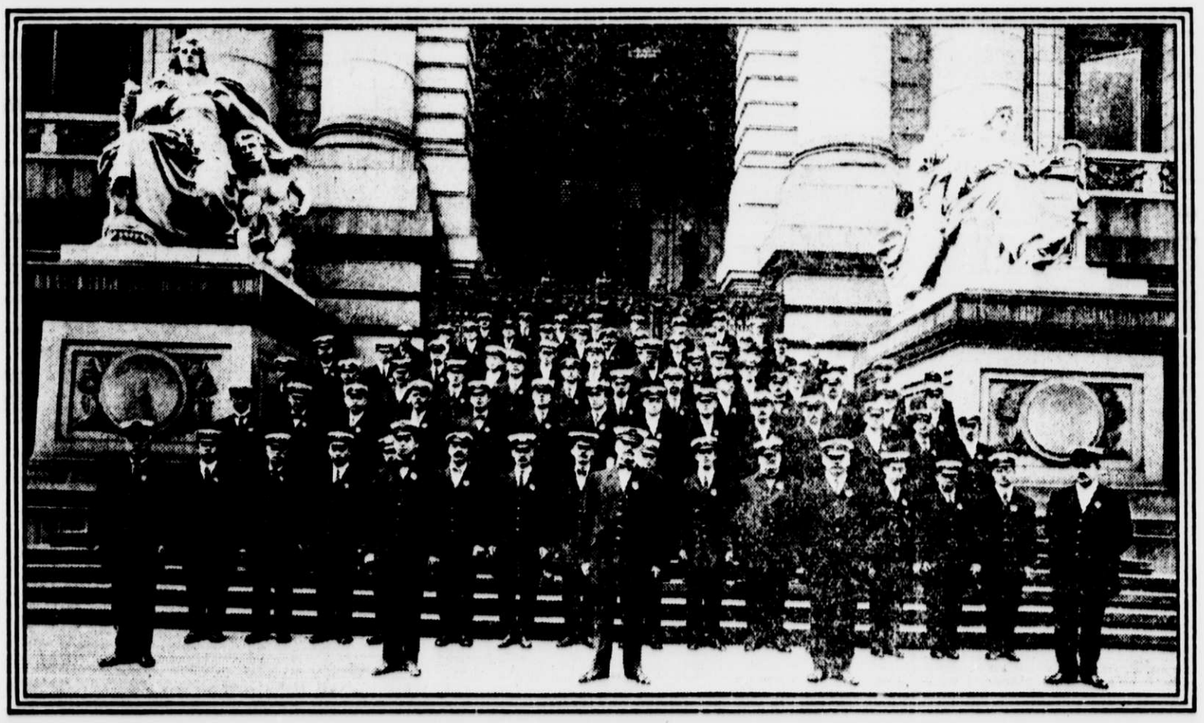
In order to avoid the necessity at the present time of paying any dues whatever Surveyor Rush's social welfare committee has taken over the Colonial Theatre for next Wednesday night, when the regular performance of the theatre will be given and the net proceeds used to establish a sinking fund so that the league may begin its activities with a substantial sum in its treasury. More than 2,000 tickets have been sold and the demand has exceeded the supply.

Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo has promised to issue a public statement approving the social welfare project on the night of the theatre party. Other Federal officials in Washington have intimated that if Surveyor Rush's plan succeeds here it will be established in other branches of the Federal Government throughout the United States.

Surveyor Rush has been made honorary president of the league, but native officers are as follows: James Hennessy, Jr. (Acting Deputy Surveyor), president; James S. Long (cashier), vice-president; Frederick D. Mackay (inspector), treasurer; E. T. Helcamp (roundsman of customs guards), recording secretary; Miss Eva F. Smith (inspectress), corresponding secretary; S. M. Hendrickson (assistant weigher), sergeant-at-arms; A. R. Burnett (clerk), P. J. Lauby (president of the Laborers Association) and J. W. Moran (gauger), members of the executive committee.

The clubrooms are situated on the top floor of the Large office at the Battery because this office is the radiating centre of the Surveyor's staff and there are usually about 450 men in the building at one time awaiting assignments to vessels expected to dock. These men will be able to employ their leisure time to good advantage either in the library or at the games provided for them by the league.

In looking for suitable quarters for the league Surveyor Rush found that about 2,000 square feet of space could be provided by rearrangement of the lockers on the top floor of the Large office, and this space is now enclosed in frame and glass partitions, with proper lighting effects. Linoleum and rugs, library chairs and tables and drop lights have been requisitioned from the Treasury Department, and sectional bookcases will be installed. The first contribution of more than 100 books has been made by Surveyor Rush. Arrangements have been made with the public circulating libraries to furnish books without charge. Miss Eva F. Smith is chairman of the library committee.



The neutrality squad of the customs guard on the Custom House steps.